

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: MPOL, PN, XM

SUBJECT: VISIT TO PANAMA BY INTER-AMERICAN DEFENSE BOARD

SUMMARY: GOP GAVE CONSIDERABLE PUBLICITY TO SUBJECT VISIT
BUT MAY HAVE OVERSOLD ITS CASE TO VISITORS. END SUMMARY.

1. DELEGATION OF OVER 60 MEMBERS AND STAFF OF INTER-AMERICAN
DEFENSE BOARD (IADB), HEADED BY US LT. GEN. GORDON SUMNER, JR.,
PAID WELL-PUBLICIZED THREE-DAY VISIT TO PANAMA NOVEMBER 6-9 AS
PART OF BOARD'S ANNUAL SWING THROUGH LATIN MEMBER COUNTRIES.
PROGRAM ORGANIZED BY GOP INCLUDED VISITS TO NEW SOCIAL SECURITY
HOSPITAL, CHILIBRE WATER PLANT, CONSTRUCTION SITE FOR NEW
TOCUMEN AIRPORT AND COLON FREE ZONE; MEETING WITH GN DEPUTY
COMMANDER GARCIA AND STAFF AT GN HEADQUARTERS; AND RECEPTION
HOSTED BY GN CHIEF OF STAFF. GEN. TORRIJOS, GN COMMANDER-IN-
CHIEF, DID NOT MEET WITH GROUP, SENDING REGRETS DUE TO POLITICAL
MATTERS DEMANDING HIS ATTENTION.

2. GROUP WAS BRIEFED ON NOVEMBER 6 BY PANEL INCLUDING MINISTER
OF COMMERCE, MINISTER OF FINANCE AND TREASURY, VICE MINISTER OF
PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (IN ABSENCE OF MINISTER AT
MEETING WITH WORLD BANK PRESIDENT MCNAMARA IN SAN JOSE), AND GOP
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TREATY ADVISER ILLUECA. FIRST THREE DESCRIBED PANAMANIAN ECONOMIC

STATUS AND DEVELOPMENT PLANS, EMPHASIZING MEASURES TO BENEFIT RURAL AND URBAN POOR AND THUS ALLEVIATE POPULAR DISCONTENT WHICH COULD LEAD TO SUBVERSION. ILLUECA SPOKE ON STATUS OF NEGOTIATIONS WITH US FOR NEW CANAL TREATY, EMPHASIZING UNITED LATIN AMERICAN SUPPORT FOR PANAMA.

3. GN RECEIVED OFFER FROM USSOUTHCOM TO PROVIDE TOUR OF US ARMY FACILITIES, INCLUDING SCHOOL OF THE AMERICAS AND JUNGLE WARFARE TRAINING CENTER, IN CANAL ZONE, BUT GN SPOKESMAN ANNOUNCED TO GROUP ON ARRIVAL THAT OTHER ACTIVITIES PLANNED HAD MADE IT IMPOSSIBLE TO SCHEDULE SUCH A VISIT.

4. ALTHOUGH PRESS CARRIED LITTLE SUBSTANTIVE COMMENTARY, VISIT RECEIVED CONSIDERABLE AND FAVORABLE PRESS COVERAGE (SEE USIS PANAMA 6845).

5. COMMENT: GN APPARENTLY ATTRIBUTED IMPORTANCE TO THIS VISIT, AND WENT TO SOME LENGTHS TO MAKE A GOOD SHOWING. HOWEVER, IN SOME WAYS, THEY APPEAR NOT TO HAVE SUCCEEDED VERY WELL. PRIOR TO GROUP'S ARRIVAL, PANAMANIAN MEMBER OF IADB LTC CARLOS MARTINEZ HAD BEEN QUOTED IN PRESS AS TO STATEMENTS ABOUT US TROOP REINFORCEMENTS IN ZONE. IN WAKE OF THESE COMMENTS, WE UNDERSTAND THAT GN "INABILITY" TO SCHEDULE VISIT TO CANAL ZONE OFFERED BY SOUTHCOM WAS NOT WELL TAKEN BY SOME OTHER LATIN MILITARY PERSONNEL PRESENT. ALSO, THERE APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN SOME FEELING AMONG LATIN MILITARY THAT ILLUECA OVERSOLD PANAMA'S CASE IN HIS TALK ON TREATY NEGOTIATIONS. THIS IS, HOWEVER, UNDERSTANDABLE IN VIEW OF NATURE OF IADB GROUP--US IS OF GREATER IMMEDIACY AND IMPORTANCE TO ITS LATIN MEMBERS THAN IS PANAMA'S PERCEPTION OF CANAL ISSUE. WHILE VISIT DOES NOT APPEAR TO HAVE SIGNIFICANTLY BENEFITED PANAMA AMONG THIS GROUP, WE DOUBT THAT THEIR IMPRESSIONS WILL HAVE MUCH TO DO WITH OVERALL PATTERN OF SOLID PUBLIC SUPPORT BY LATIN GOVERNMENTS FOR PANAMANIAN POSITION ON CANAL ISSUE. END COMMENT.

JORDEN

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